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A CITIZEN’S GUIDE
TO LOBBYING

Introduction

The basic premise of government in the United States was stated simply by Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address: “...government of the people, by the people, for the people...”

Yet, many people are unfamiliar with how their government works. They don’t realize that by participating they can influence policy.

This pamphlet explains how to effectively participate in the legislative – or lawmaking – process. The process is most effective when people share their views with their elected representatives. By lobbying, average citizens can influence an elected official’s position on an issue.

Influencing the process begins with being informed. Keep up on the issues. Know the elected officials who make decisions at each level of government - City Council, County Board of Supervisors, State Legislature and Congress.

By actively participating, you become part of the process. You can have an impact on the decisions that establish policy and create new laws.

The lawmaking process

It is important to know the steps in the process in order to understand how an idea becomes a bill, and how a bill becomes law. Review the process and then plot a strategy to increase the chances of a bill’s passage or defeat.

California has a bicameral, or two house Legislature. The Senate has 40 members, the Assembly has 80. The legislative process begins with an idea, often from an individual or group, who brings the idea to a legislator and asks the legislator to author a bill. The individual or group becomes the bill’s sponsor.

The idea is the impetus for new legislation. The proposed legislation goes to Legislative Counsel to draft the actual bill text. After the author reviews the bill, along with the sponsor, it is then introduced, given a number, and read the first time in the house of origin.

In both houses, the Rules Committee assigns the bill to policy committees and, if the bill has any fiscal impact, it must also go to a fiscal committee. The bill goes through the house of origin first, and then repeats the process in the second house. If both houses concur, the bill goes to the Governor. If both houses cannot concur, it goes to a Conference Committee.

Get to know your legislators

Become familiar with the elected officials who represent you. Contact the local district office to schedule an appointment. You can also contact the office online or attend a public meeting.

Many legislators hold public meetings to get to know the people they represent - their constituents - and to learn about local concerns. By understanding community issues a legislator can better represent his/her constituents.

Correspond with your elected officials

Contact from citizens can influence a legislator’s position on issues. Hearing from constituents helps legislators stay informed on important community issues and establish resources which allows them to effectively represent their constituents.

Legislators are contacted not only by their own constituents, but also by citizens from other districts throughout California. Most legislators respond promptly. However, due to the large volume of letters and phone calls they receive, they often respond only to their constituents.

Helpful guidelines for writing your letter:

- Send a letter as early in the session as possible.
- Be brief and to the point, courteous and reasonable.
- Include your name and address.
- Identify the problem and what should be done.
- Show the local effects and tangible positive results of your position.
- Find out which committees will hear the bill.
- Write committee members prior to the bill's hearing.
- Address your elected official with the appropriate title, such as State Senator instead of United States Senator.

(date)

The Honorable Senator John Doe
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Doe:

I am writing in support of SB XXX that will be heard on the Senate floor next month. The bill will have the following effect in the community: (expand on issues related to the bill.)

Thank you for taking time to review my concerns. After this bill comes up for a vote, I would like to be informed as to how you voted and why. I am available to answer questions or provide testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,

(your name)
(address)

How to lobby

Once the bill has been introduced, find out which legislators on the committee are sympathetic to your view and which need to be persuaded. To evaluate their views, look at their interests, voting records and constituencies, as well as their media coverage.

Never assume you know how a legislator will vote. Always check to make sure all questions have been answered. Spend more time with legislators who are undecided or inclined to vote against you.

Legislators have done their homework before the committee hearing and have decided their positions. At the hearing itself, the only additional votes to be gained are by those who are undecided.

Follow up with a phone call or visit to undecided legislators a day or two before the hearing. The most persuasive argument you can use is to tell a legislator how a bill will affect his or her district.

Lobbying in person

Talking to legislators in person can help you get the vote you want. Here are a few suggestions:

- Find out who is on the committee that will hear the bill.
- Set up appointments with committee members.
- If a legislator is unavailable, ask to speak to his or her key aide.
- Have printed material available.
- Be prepared and be brief; quickly present highlights of the bill and list supporters.
- Ask about amendments which would make the bill acceptable. Suggested amendments must be taken back to the author and supporters. After a decision is made on the amendment, make sure you get back to the member who suggested it.
- If the legislator has no suggestions, thank him for taking the time to hear your views.

Testifying on a bill

- Contact the author of the bill and indicate that you would like to testify.
- Coordinate your testimony with others who are testifying so statements before the committee will be brief and not redundant.
- Be prepared to answer questions on the bill, especially on issues of concern to the opposition.
- Be sure to thank the committee chairperson and committee members for the opportunity to express your views.

Stay current - bills are often amended.

Check the status of bills on the California Senate's website at www.senate.ca.gov. Official legislative publications are also available, such as:

SENATE DAILY FILE

the agenda and bills set for hearing

SENATE WEEKLY HISTORY

indicates status of each bill

SENATE DAILY JOURNAL

official record of proceedings

LEGISLATIVE INDEX

list of all bills introduced, by subject

Understand the types of legislation.

SENATE BILL (SB) - requires a majority vote; if there is a fiscal impact, requires a two-thirds vote.

SENATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT (SCA) - requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature and a vote by the people.

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION (SCR) - relates to general matters of concern to the Legislature.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION (SJR) - conveys to the federal government views of the Legislature.

HOUSE RESOLUTION (HR) - matters of concern to one house.

Use the internet

On the Senate website you will find:

- Bill text, resolutions and constitutional amendments, the status, history, votes, analyses and veto messages
- Answers to frequently asked questions (FAQS)
- Live Senate hearings, floor sessions and press conferences
- The day's scheduled events, agendas of upcoming hearings, floor session schedules, the legislative calendar and deadlines
- A glossary of legislative terms
- Senators' web pages
- A roster of addresses and phone numbers
- Which Senator represents you
- District maps
- Information about Senate and Assembly committees
- Links to other state agencies and media websites
- Links to national, state and local government websites:
 - ▶ **United States Congress**
www.thomas.loc.gov
 - ▶ **California State Senate**
www.senate.ca.gov
 - ▶ **California State Assembly**
www.assembly.ca.gov
 - ▶ **California State Association of Counties**
www.csac.counties.org
 - ▶ **League of California Cities**
www.cacities.org

Participate!

Remember that you are an important part of the legislative process. By getting involved and actively participating, you can influence the decisions that create new laws.